

**THE FEASIBILITY OF CONTINUING THE UTILIZATION OF FIRE  
PREVENTION STAFF IN CERTAIN COMMAND STAFF POSITIONS  
FOR SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS, FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**EXECUTIVE ANALYSIS OF FIRE SERVICE OPERATIONS IN  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

On June 8, 1998, the DeBruce Grain Elevator in Sedgwick County, Kansas, experienced a series of grain dust explosions. During the disaster, the Fire Prevention Staff of the Sedgwick County Fire Department was utilized in certain command staff positions. The problem was that the practice of using Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions had never been carried out or evaluated. The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the feasibility of continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for Sedgwick County Fire Department.

This research employed evaluative research and was supported by descriptive and historical methodologies (a) to assess the presence or absence of interest from the Sedgwick County Fire Chief and Fire Marshal to continue the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions; (b) to assess the presence or absence of interest from the Fire Prevention Staff to continue their utilization as certain command staff personnel; and (c) to identify the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions.

The procedures employed were a review of literature relating to the topics of information officer and liaison officer, as well as personal interviews with the Fire Chief, Fire Marshal and the Fire Prevention Staff on the department. The questions asked in the interviews are contained in the Appendix. There were several key findings of this research. All parties interviewed expressed an interest in continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command

staff positions. There were numerous advantages (efficiency, past operations experience, familiarity with department policies/procedures, and experience in dealing with the media and the public) mentioned.

Two disadvantages (lack of a contingency plan for carrying out their routine fire prevention duties when they are serving as command staff officers at prolonged incidents and that continuing command staff training becomes a priority) were explored. All six officers interviewed presented suggestions for improving the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions.

The recommendations resulting from this research included (a) continue the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions, (b) annual refresher training on liaison and information officer duties should be attained by each fire prevention officer, (c) when disaster drills and/or simulations are conducted in the future, the Fire Prevention Staff should participate in those exercises in the liaison officer and information officer positions, (d) a contingency plan should be developed whereby the routine fire prevention duties are addressed while the Fire Prevention Staff is performing as command staff officers at prolonged incidents, (e) when command staff training is conducted in the future, each fire prevention officer should become competent in both areas of liaison officer and information officer so that adequate rotation schedules could be established.

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## INTRODUCTION

On June 8, 1998, the DeBruce Grain Elevator in Sedgwick County, Kansas, suffered a series of grain dust explosions. The resulting disaster taxed the Sedgwick County Fire Department and the surrounding area's emergency services departments in the following days and weeks. During this disaster every member of the department played a role in the mitigation of the incident. Major areas addressed were rescue, recovery, and suppression operations. The Incident Command System is used by the fire department as part of its Standard Operating Procedures. This disaster was no different in that regard. During the DeBruce disaster, the Fire Prevention Staff was utilized in several of the command staff positions. The problem was that the practice of using our Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions had never been carried out or evaluated.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the feasibility of continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for the Sedgwick County, Kansas, Fire Department. The primary research methodology used in this study was evaluative, which was supported by both descriptive and historical methodologies, to answer the following questions:

1. Is there interest from the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal to continue utilizing Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions?
2. Is there interest from the Fire Prevention Staff to continue serving in certain command staff positions?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Sedgwick County, Kansas, Fire Department consists of 139 full-time paid personnel. There are currently eight stations, which protect over 640 square miles and serve a population of over 100,000 citizens. The department responds to a wide range of emergencies from rural to urban. Sedgwick County is the county surrounding the city of Wichita. Wichita has a population of over 300,000. The department has a joint Hazardous Materials Response Team and a joint Technical Rescue Team with the Wichita Fire Department. In addition, the department has an enhanced first responder agreement with the Wichita Fire Department. Sedgwick County Fire Department has three divisions: Operations, Safety/Training, and Fire Prevention. The operations division consists of one Deputy Chief, three Division Chiefs (one for each shift), 24 Captains, 21 Lieutenants, and 75 firefighters. The safety/training division consists of three Division Chiefs (one for each shift). The fire prevention division consists of the Fire Marshal, one Division Chief, and three Fire Prevention Lieutenants.

On June 8, 1998, the DeBruce Grain Elevator located in Sedgwick County, Kansas, was rocked by a series of grain dust explosions. This grain elevator was the third largest grain elevator in the world, and the largest under one headhouse. At full capacity it was capable of holding over 60 million bushels of grain. On the day of the explosions it was at one-third capacity, with approximately 20.3 million bushels of wheat and milo. The blasts occurred at 9:19 a.m., Central Daylight Time. The concussion from the blasts was felt over ten miles away. There were 16 people working in the elevator that Monday morning. In the aftermath of the incident it was determined that nine of those workers were injured and seven were killed.

Emergency responders from surrounding cities, counties, and the state, responded to the scene. The FEMA USART Team from Lincoln, Nebraska, also responded to assist in the rescue efforts. Due to the magnitude of this tragedy all of our fire department personnel played a part in the mitigation of the incident. The Fire Prevention Staff was utilized as Liaison Officers and Public Information Officers and thereby played a vital role in assisting the Incident Command function at this disaster.

Currently the department has begun examining and evaluating all aspects of its response to this incident. It is hoped that every part of the disaster response and its mitigation will be examined to determine what lessons can be learned from this tragedy. The problem for this document was to evaluate the continuing utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions. The topic of command staff positions, such as liaison officer and public information officer, were relevant to several units in the Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management Course for the Executive Fire Officer Program. Those units were Incident Command System, Emergency Operations, Capability Assessment, and Media Relations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine published documents relating to the command staff positions of public information officer and liaison officer, and to examine the duties, responsibilities, training, and traits needed by individuals who perform those functions. There were several references that addressed the three command staff positions of safety, liaison,

and public information officer (Fire Department Incident Management System, [FDIMS], 1995; Hanson, 1990; Hawkins, McClees, 1988; Kramer, Bahme, 1992; Sweetnam, 1996). In each instance these individuals reported directly to the Incident Commander. There were several definitions found for both the information officer and the liaison officer. One such definition was, “The information officer shall provide liaison between the media and the incident commander. The information officer shall consult with the incident commander regarding any constraints on the release of information and shall prepare press briefings” (FDIMS, 1995, p.8). Another stated, “The information officer provides information and media releases within the constraints of the I.C.” (Kramer, Bahme, 1992, p.73).

The necessity of having a public information officer no matter the size of the department was addressed by numerous sources (Cowardin, 1987; Hughes, 1990; Kuban, 1996; Leonard, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Riha, Handschuh, 1995; Schaper, 1991; Stittleburg, 1994; Trubia, 1989). “The fire service has a story to tell and it should be told. Since the news media is going to get the story anyway, the information might as well come directly from the department. A public information officer is the answer” (Schaper, 1990, p.54). The public information officer could be the incident commander in minor incidents. However, in major and/or complex events, the utilization of someone other than the incident commander was beneficial (Airport/Community Planning, 1986).

There were several examples found in the literature about who could serve as the public information officer (Paul, 1998; Schaper, 1990; Schaper, 1991; Trubia, 1989). These choices consisted of individuals who were officers or staff members of the department or individuals who had expertise regarding the particular incident and were on specialty teams for the

department. In either instance it was recommended that the public information officer not be the incident commander if the incident was still in progress (Leonard, 1993; Trubia, 1989).

The public relations aspect of having a competent public information officer was mentioned in several articles (Jenaway, 1988; Leonard, Mackey, 1994; Schaper, 1991; Szymanski, Brown, & Paulsell, 1986; Tucker, 1986). It was felt that the information officer had numerous opportunities to inform and educate the public and at the same time market the department and its services (Hughes, 1990; Leonard, 1993; Patterson, 1993).

There were numerous duties found that the public information officer should perform (Allison, 1984; Cooksey, 1985; Fowler, 1993; Hanson, 1990; Kuban, 1996; Leonard, 1993; Leonard, Mackey, 1994; Potter, 1990, September/October; Riha, Handschuh, 1995). Some of those duties were: gather information from the incident commander, select location to brief media, prepare summary of information, clear summary with the incident commander, release summary to the media, schedule periodic briefings, escort media and dignitaries through the site or scene if necessary, and arrange interviews with the incident commander and/or other personnel if needed.

It was found that the public information officer should possess many personal traits (Birr, 1982; Cooksey, 1985; Fenichel, 1994; Hughes, 1990; Patterson, 1993, Paul, 1998; Schaper, 1990; Schaper, 1991; Stephenson, 1994; Stittleburg, 1994; Trubia, 1989; Tucker, 1986). Some important ones mentioned were: honesty, integrity, able to communicate effectively in writing and orally, ability to think on his/her feet, knowledge of department and its operations, policies and people, able to get complete and accurate information, credible, intelligent, flexible, and ability to present a positive image of the department. There were several articles that

specifically mentioned that the information officer should have a working knowledge or actual field experience as a firefighter on the department (Birrr, 1982; Leonard, 1993; Paul, 1998; Schaper, 1991; Stephenson, 1994; Tucker, 1986).

Training for public information officers was mentioned in several sources (Cooksey, 1985; Fowler, 1993; Hoetmer, 1983; Potter, 1990, March/April; Sweetnam, 1996; Training for public information officers, 1985). Topics for training included: planning, media relations, writing and preparing news releases, public speaking, interview techniques, legal aspects, disaster drills and simulations, and emergency operations center functions. It was felt that this training needed to be ongoing so that these individuals could maintain their skill levels. The necessity of having more than one person who could perform information officer duties was found in several sources (Allison, 1984; Bruno, 1992; Cowardin, 1987; Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 1979; Fowler, 1993; Leonard, 1993; Paul, 1998; Szymanski et al. 1986). “It is ideal to have several trained public information officers in the field during major incidents. These PIO’s should be well trained in field operations” (Potter, 1990, March/April, p.11).

The use of public information officer teams was found in several cites (Fowler, 1993; Hughes, 1990; Paul, 1998; Potter, 1990, March/April; Potter, 1990, September/October). It was felt that this PIO team would help to spread the workload at large or extended events and be more effective and efficient. “Experience over the past few years indicates that large-scale events need more than one PIO at the scene, and sometimes PIO support back at headquarters” (Fowler, 1993, p. 3).

The media plays a very important role in the scope of the public information officers' duties. "If the reporter cannot get timely, accurate information from you, they will obtain it from someone else whose information likely will be not as accurate, and perhaps has an uncomplimentary bias" (Paul, 1998, p.3). Another source stated, "Both media and fire people have the same job, to serve the public" (Trubia, 1989, p. 66). The media can influence public perception and set the agenda for public policy (Singer, Endreny, 1993). Studies of the media show that rare and/or new accidents are more newsworthy than common ones. In addition, dramatic accidents which result in numerous fatalities and/or injuries are considered more newsworthy than ones that do not (Singer, Endreny, 1993). The media has the right to be at an emergency scene and to ask anything and everything (Fenichel, 1994). The best way to deal with the media is to be proactive and have a preplan on how to respond to them when you have a newsworthy event (Bruno, 1992; Cooksey, 1985; Cowardin, 1987; Hawkins, McClees, 1988; Tranchina, 1991; Trubia, 1989).

The importance of building a rapport with the media was mentioned in several articles (Birr, 1982; Cowardin, 1987; FEMA, 1979; Hoetmer, 1983; Hughes, 1990; Leonard, 1993; Stephenson, 1994; Szymanski et al. 1986; Trubia, 1989; Tucker, 1986). The basic information that the media wants addressed at an emergency incident is who, what, where, when, why, and how (Allison, 1984; Birr, 1982; Cooksey, 1985; Fenichel, 1994; Hughes, 1990; Patterson, 1993; Riha, Handschuh, 1995; Schaper, 1990; Schaper, 1991; Stittleburg, 1994; Trubia, 1989). The importance of having a PIO worksheet or form developed ahead of time was mentioned in several articles (Allison, 1984; Birr, 1982; Paul, 1998). Depending on the size and complexity of

the incident it was suggested that it may be necessary to schedule media updates two to three times per day or every several hours for extended emergencies (Paul, 1998).

Having a designated location or control point for the media was addressed in several articles (Allison, 1984; Cowardin, 1987; Fowler, 1993; Hawkins, McClees, 1988; Nagy, Denney, 1987; Patterson, 1993; Paul, 1998; Potter, 1990, March/April; Riha, Handschuh, 1995; Trubia, 1989). This location should be a safe area and should have adequate facilities for the media to use, such as parking and restrooms. If possible, have the location for the media site close enough to the emergency scene to allow for photographic opportunities. If that is not possible, consider establishing a media pool or press pool whereby a limited number of video cameras and still photographers are allowed to enter the scene to take pictures and then share their photographs and film with the other media agencies (Cowardin, 1987; Paul, 1998). Once the incident site is safe, it is usually a good idea to give the media a tour of the site. Be sure to provide them with any safety equipment for this tour, if any is needed (Allison, 1984).

There were several definitions found regarding the liaison officer (FDIMS, 1995; Kramer, Bahme, 1992; National Interagency Incident Management System, [NIIMS], 1982). “The liaison officer shall provide a point of contact for assisting and cooperating agencies. The liaison officer shall identify current or potential interagency needs” (FDIMS, 1995, p.8). The liaison officer, like the other command staff officers, has the authority to act for the incident commander. He assists other agencies and coordinates activities. It may be necessary to have additional liaison staff officers at large or complex incidents (Hanson, 1990).

Some examples of different types of liaison officers found were water (Burns, 1986), emergency (Brannigan, 1990), recycling (Van Buren, 1995), and family (Stinson, 1989). The

family liaison officer could be a chaplain or department member, must be familiar with fire department activities, and must be properly trained. It was suggested that several members be able to fill this role if necessary (Stinson, 1989). “Any incident we work will have other victims. Whenever possible, these people, too, should be the object of our professional attention. The immediate appointment by the incident commander of a family liaison officer begins the process” (Stinson, 1989, p. 20). A checklist for the liaison officer was found and it consisted of the following parts: ICS form 214, monitor incident operations, provide point of contact, identify agency representatives, receive briefings from I.C., and respond to requests for inter-organizational contacts (NIIMS, 1982).

In summary, the literature reviewed provided information and insights into the roles and responsibilities of the public information officer and the liaison officer. Both of these assignments are part of the command staff and the individuals responsible for them report directly to the incident commander.

## **PROCEDURES**

The Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, the Wichita State University Ablah Library, and the public library of the City of Wichita, Kansas, were used to conduct a literature search on the command staff positions of information officer and liaison officer.

## **Instrumentation**

Six personal interviews were conducted in August and September of 1998. The following officers were interviewed: Gary E. Curmode, the Fire Chief of Sedgwick County Fire Department; Larry L. Masters, the Fire Marshal of Sedgwick County Fire Department; Kenneth Cox, Division Chief of Fire Prevention for Sedgwick County Fire Department; Walter Rooney, Fire Prevention Lieutenant for Sedgwick County Fire Department; Kevin Holman, Fire Prevention Lieutenant for Sedgwick County Fire Department; and Patti Peterson, Fire Prevention Lieutenant for Sedgwick County Fire Department. The interviews consisted of five questions (see Appendix), all of which were asked of each officer. Each personal interview was approximately one hour in duration. The interviews were conducted in my office and explored the feasibility of continuing the utilization of fire prevention staff in certain command staff positions.

## **Definitions**

Command Staff:

“The Command Staff consists of the Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer, who report directly to the Incident Commander” (Firescope California, 1996, p. 12-3).

Information Officer:

“The Information Officer is responsible for developing and releasing information about the incident to the news media, to incident personnel, and to other appropriate agencies and organizations” (Firescope California, 1996, p. 5-3).

Liaison Officer:

“The Liaison Officer is the contact for the personnel assigned to the incident by assisting or cooperating agencies” (Firescope California, 1996, p. 5-5).

### **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the feasibility of continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for Sedgwick County, Kansas, Fire Department. The research was descriptive research in that personal interviews were conducted with fire department officers to assess their interest and opinions in utilizing Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions. The research was historical research in that a literature review was conducted to identify all aspects relating to the positions of information officer and liaison officer. The research was evaluative research in that the information obtained through historical and descriptive research was analyzed and evaluated. Any similarities and differences were noted, and as a result, the feasibility of continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for Sedgwick County Fire Department was explored.

## **RESULTS**

(Personal interview questions used are in the Appendix)

### **Answers to Research Questions**

Research Question 1. It was apparent from the personal interviews with the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal that there was interest in continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions. The Fire Chief (G.E. Curmode, personal interview, September

1, 1998) stated, “Using Fire Prevention Staff for the command staff positions allows our fire department to be more efficient. It frees up our operations people to concentrate on and handle the operations area.” The Fire Marshal (L.L. Masters, personal interview, September 1, 1998) stated, “I would strongly recommend using Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions. They can assist in those areas and it allows the operations personnel to perform their normal functions.” He also stated, “During major incidents you will need to use all of your department’s resources. It only makes sense to match your resources to the task at hand. The Fire Prevention Staff can perform the command staff positions.” Both the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal expressed interest in continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions.

Research Question 2. It was clear from the personal interviews with the Fire Prevention Staff that there was interest in continuing to serve in certain command staff positions. Chief Cox (K.W. Cox, personal interview, August 31, 1998) stated, “Yes, I believe we should continue using the Fire Prevention Staff in that fashion.” He also stated, “Who better to perform the public information officer and liaison officer duties than the Fire Prevention Staff? On our department, the Fire Prevention Staff have experience in both operations and in fire prevention, where they deal with the public and media.” Lieutenant Rooney (W. D. Rooney, personal interview, August 27, 1998) agreed saying, “At major incidents, like the DeBruce incident, you need the Fire Prevention Staff to assist in the command staff functions.” He went on to state, “The Fire Prevention Staff has experience in operations as well as the fire prevention areas of public education, investigation, and inspections, and this can be very beneficial when you need someone to fulfill the command staff positions.” Lieutenant Holman (K. Holman, personal

interview, August 26, 1998) stated, “After going through the DeBruce incident and serving as both a liaison officer and public information officer at different times, yes, I would do it again, definitely.” He went on to add, “I learned a lot and would be interested in filling those roles again in the future.” Lieutenant Peterson (P.Z. Peterson, personal interview, August 26, 1998) said, “Yes, I am interested in doing it again. It was a very good experience.” She added, “The Fire Prevention Staff deals with the public on a daily basis and being an information officer or liaison officer is just an extension of that.” The Fire Prevention Staff expressed an interest in continuing their utilization as command staff officers.

Research Question 3. All the officers interviewed gave numerous advantages of the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for the Sedgwick County (Kansas) Fire Department. Chief Curmode stated, “Our Fire Prevention Staff has an operations background. That is very beneficial when serving as a command staff officer.” He went on to add, “They can answer the media’s questions while serving as a public information officer, and they can serve as a liaison officer since they are familiar with our department’s policies and procedures.” Fire Marshal Masters stated, “They deal with the media and public on a routine basis, plus they have the training and experience that the command staff positions need.” Chief Cox concurred, “We have a good overview of the whole picture. We have had operations experience, plus we have had experience in dealing with the public and media.” He went on to state, “During the DeBruce incident, I was the information officer. My rapport with the media, while performing my regular duties prior to the incident, was a major factor in the success of the information officer functions at this incident.” Lieutenant Rooney stated, “Job experience was a key factor in how we performed in the command staff positions.” He went on to add, “I was the

lead investigator for the DeBruce incident. In that role I was the liaison officer for the other agencies' investigators. There was a lot of coordination and communication to make it work." Lt. Rooney also stated, "The success of my actions as a liaison officer for the DeBruce incident was the result of the rapport that was built ahead of time with the area fire investigators, State Fire Marshals Office, and the ATF investigators." Lieutenant Holman stated, "Coming up through the ranks and having an operations background in addition to my fire prevention experience was a big help." He went on to add, "Having experience in both areas made my job as a liaison officer and information officer easier." Lieutenant Peterson stated, "Operations personnel want to be at the scene and be active doing the hands-on work. By having the Fire Prevention Staff serving as command staff officers you are matching your people to the appropriate tasks."

There were few disadvantages discussed regarding the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions. Fire Marshal Masters stated, "There could be disadvantages if the Fire Prevention Staff didn't have the appropriate training for the command staff assignments they were given." Chief Cox mentioned, "When major incidents occur and we fill in as command staff officers, it takes us out of our normal routine." He added, "As a result, the day to day activities of fire prevention may be placed on the back burner." Lieutenant Rooney concurred, "Luckily we don't have disasters or major incidents on a regular basis." He added, "Having all the Fire Prevention Staff fill in as command staff officers for incidents lasting several days or weeks could hamper their normal day to day work load if contingency plans were not in place." Chief Curmode stated, "A disadvantage would be if all fire prevention personnel were not able to perform the duties of a liaison officer or public information officer." He added,

“At major incidents that will last for several days or longer, each fire prevention officer should have the training and experience to fill in a command staff position as needed.”

Several suggestions were mentioned by the officers for improving the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in command staff positions. Chief Curmode stated, “I would suggest that the Fire Prevention Staff receive continuing training on PIO and liaison activities.” He added, “Disasters don’t happen everyday, so we need to sharpen our skills periodically.” Another suggestion by Chief Curmode was, “In the future when we conduct joint disaster drills for the area, we need to be sure to include the Fire Prevention Staff in those drills. This would help them sharpen their skills in the command staff positions.” Fire Marshal Masters concurred, “When we have disaster drills in the future, the fire prevention people should be involved in that training experience, too.” He also stated, “They need to continually have the training to do those specific jobs and they need to understand what the job entails.”

Chief Cox stated, “It would be beneficial to have some periodic training with the area chaplains and clergy on how to function as a family liaison officer.” He added, “Each fire prevention officer should be able to fill either the liaison function or the information officer function.” His final suggestion was, “Fire Prevention Staff should be involved in future disaster drills so that they can have the training and familiarity with the liaison and information officer functions, to have a positive effect on the real incident when it does occur.” Lieutenant Rooney concurred, “We should be included in any future disaster drills or simulations. That type of training would help us keep up on our command staff skills.” Lieutenant Holman stated, “Establishing a rotation schedule for the Fire Prevention Staff while they are serving as command staff officers at prolonged events is a must.” He added, “When an incident is going to

last for several days, setting up a duty schedule for command staff officers becomes very important.”

Lieutenant Peterson stated, “Being included in any future disaster exercises would be a good training opportunity for the Fire Prevention Staff.” She added, “Initial and periodic training from area chaplains and clergy would be valuable, too. For the DeBruce incident I was a family liaison officer, and I learned a lot from working with them.” Her final suggestion was, “Having each fire prevention officer familiar with both the liaison and information officer functions would be a real plus.”

The interviews did confirm the presence of interest by the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal to continue the utilization of the Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions. In addition, the interviews did confirm the presence of interest by the Fire Prevention Staff to continue serving in certain command staff positions. During the course of the interviews several advantages and disadvantages of the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions were discussed.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this research were very similar to the findings that were discussed in the literature. In the literature search several personal traits were discussed as needed by individuals who would be serving as a liaison officer or information officer. They were: ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing, knowledge of department’s operations, policies and people, and ability to present a positive image of the department (Birrr, 1982; Cooksey, 1985; Fenichel, 1994; Hughes, 1990; Patterson, 1993; Paul, 1998; Schaper, 1990; Schaper, 1991;

Stephenson, 1994; Stittleburg, 1994; Trubia, 1989; Tucker, 1986). Personal traits given by the officers interviewed for being a liaison or information officer were their prior experience in operations, familiarity with the departments' procedures, ability to inform and educate the public orally and in writing, and ability to market the department and its services.

The literature search had several suggestions as to which individuals should serve as liaison or information officers. Those mentioned were fire department officers or staff who have the necessary background and training (Paul, 1998; Schaper, 1990; Schaper, 1991; Trubia, 1989). The officers interviewed expressed these same beliefs. The fire prevention officers mentioned that they deal with the media on a routine basis and have established a rapport with them. They also have a familiarity in dealing with the public and with other agencies. The necessity of developing a rapport with the media was addressed in several articles (Birr, 1982; Cowardin, 1987; FEMA, 1979; Hoetmer, 1983; Hughes, 1990; Leonard, 1993; Stephenson, 1994; Szymanski et al. 1986; Trubia, 1989; Tucker, 1986). Those factors, along with having an operations background makes the Fire Prevention Staff a logical choice to fill the liaison and information officer roles.

The necessity of having enough trained individuals who could serve as liaison officers and information officers was addressed by the officers interviewed and in the literature search. The literature sources mentioned having a cadre of trained individuals who could perform those duties, especially at major incidents which may last for extended periods (Allison, 1984; Bruno, 1992; Cowardin, 1987; FEMA, 1979; Fowler, 1993; Leonard, 1993; Paul, 1998; Szymanski et al. 1986). The officers interviewed stated that it would be beneficial to have each fire prevention officer sufficiently trained, so that they could handle either the liaison or information officer

position, especially at incidents that will last for several days or weeks. In addition, both the literature search (Cooksey, 1985; Fowler, 1993; Hoetmer, 1983; Potter, 1990, March/April; Sweetnam, 1996; Training for public information officers, 1985) and the officers interviewed mentioned the importance of receiving continuing training regarding the information officer and liaison officer functions. Preplanning (Bruno, 1992; Cooksey, 1985; Cowardin, 1987; Hawkins, McClees, 1988; Tranchina, 1991; Trubia, 1989) and the necessity of using “teams” (Fowler, 1993; Hughes, 1990; Paul, 1998; Potter, 1990, March/April; Potter, 1990, September/October) for the duties of liaison officer and information officer were discussed by both the officers interviewed and the literature searched. It was felt that the aspect of preplanning should be a part of this process just as it is in other fire department activities. In dealing with major incidents, the idea of establishing individual liaison and information officer “teams” to address all their respective duties becomes a necessity.

There were a few concerns discussed by the officers interviewed regarding the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions. Those concerns centered on ensuring that the Fire Prevention Staff have adequate training to fulfill the liaison and information officer functions, and in the event that an extended incident occurs, that there be contingency plans developed to address the day to day tasks that the Fire Prevention Staff is normally expected to perform.

In summary, each officer interviewed expressed an interest in continuing the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions. In addition, each officer offered advantages and suggestions for improving the process. As Chief Cox stated, “The Fire Prevention Staff can serve a vital link in the disaster management process.”

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The utilization of Fire Prevention Staff in certain command staff positions for Sedgwick County Fire Department should continue. Since continuing training regarding the liaison and information officer positions was mentioned by each officer interviewed, this issue should be addressed. Therefore, each fire prevention officer should receive annual refresher training on the liaison and information officer duties.

In addition, the oversight of not including the Fire Prevention Staff in previous disaster drills and/or simulations must be addressed. Therefore, when future disaster drills and/or simulations are conducted, the Fire Prevention Staff should participate in those exercises in the liaison officer and information officer positions.

The possibility that Fire Prevention Staff could be away from their day to day activities for an extended period while serving as command staff officers during prolonged events must be addressed. Therefore, a contingency plan should be developed whereby the routine fire prevention duties are addressed while the Fire Prevention Staff is performing as command staff officers at prolonged incidents.

The necessity of each fire prevention officer being able to perform as either the liaison or information officer during prolonged incidents should be addressed. Therefore, when command staff training is conducted in the future, each fire prevention officer should become competent in both areas of liaison officer and information officer. This would aid in establishing the rotation schedule for those positions, mentioned by several of them, during prolonged incidents.

One aspect that should be addressed in the future is the possibility of utilizing Fire Prevention Staff for not only the liaison and information officers' positions, but also for the safety officer position. Additional training would possibly be needed, depending on the past operational experience of the fire prevention officer, but having the capability of using your Fire Prevention Staff for ALL command staff positions would be worth studying.

By instituting the recommendations listed above, the utilization of Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions for Sedgwick County Fire Department will definitely be enhanced.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF CONTINUING THE UTILIZATION OF FIRE PREVENTION STAFF IN CERTAIN COMMAND STAFF POSITIONS**

1. In which command staff position(s) did you serve during the DeBruce Grain Elevator disaster?
2. What are the advantages, if any, of using Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions?
3. What are the disadvantages, if any, of using Fire Prevention Staff for certain command staff positions?
4. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving the practice of having Fire Prevention Staff assigned to certain command staff positions?
5. Should Fire Prevention Staff continue to be utilized for certain command staff positions? Why or Why not?